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## Let's Get Civil: Good Manners Nurture Good Relationships

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POSTED SEP 14, 2007

Think of good manners as the grease that keeps the wheels spinning smoothly in any type of relationship. Let them dry up, and you can get a whole lot of screeching going on.

### **Note your words, actions with loved ones**

Sometimes, we'll be perfectly polite to strangers, and then rude and inconsiderate with those we love. Why is that? Because we let down our guard at home? Because we don't have any energy left to be polite? It doesn't take that much effort to be more considerate. We just need to develop the habit of good manners.

Think of how positively you respond to someone who enters a room and asks how you are, listens to the answer, says "thank you" for small gestures, and say "please" when asking for something. And then picture the reverse: being ignored, interrupted or ordered around. You can already feel your temperature starting to rise.

### **Good manners indicate respect, ease strains**

Don't take those closest to you for granted. Thoughtless words, gestures and actions can quickly turn "little" issues into big problems. According to experts, the root of anger is the feeling deep down that somehow we are unworthy and unlovable. When we feel disrespected, neglected, or otherwise treated badly, when someone intentionally or unintentionally pushes those buttons, we can go off in a rage. If we can learn not to push those buttons in others (and not allow other people to push ours), we can diffuse many of the "little" sparks that can set off an inferno of anger.

Think of it this way: Bad manners take money out of the "bank" of your relationship while using good manners makes an investment in that same relationship. While good manners cannot solve all relationship ills, they can avoid creating mountains out of molehills and ease the strain of everyday ups and downs.

### **Good manners are good for you**

Experts say that practicing good manners is not only good for the "other" person, it's good for you

too. Being nice reduces our stress level. In turn, this reduces a host of problems associated with stress—heart disease and a weakened immune system to name two big ones.

### **Improve everyday encounters**

Manners are also civilized society's way of preventing needless confrontations, insults and hurt feelings. If you start off a conversation with a smile and a level of politeness, you immediately set the stage for the rest of the encounter. Likewise if you open up with rudeness, then you put someone on the defensive. If someone feels that her self-worth is being attacked, she will fight back and the conflict escalates. Make good manners a habit today, and you'll immediately feel less tension in your life.

You'll also improve the many relationships you have with people throughout your daily life—grocery store clerks, bank tellers, neighbors, etc. Start by modeling good manners and civility, and chances are people will return your good behavior in kind. Not always ... but you'll greatly increase the chances of positive encounters.

### **Tips for building and improving good manners**

- Put your spouse or significant other on the top of the “be polite to” list.
- Model good manners to your children.
- Greet people with a smile whenever possible.
- Look people in the eye occasionally, but don't stare. Look just above or below a person's eyes if direct eye contact is too uncomfortable. A trick to remember to make occasional eye contact is to take note of the other person's eye color.
- Don't interrupt. Learn to listen attentively. Show someone you're listening with nods of encouragement, with brief comments and by reflecting back what you've heard.
- Don't watch TV, check e-mails or answer your cell phone when someone is talking to you. Give him your full attention.
- Watch your language for harsh words and tones.
- Avoid sarcasm and “jokes” at someone else's expense.
- Apologize when you're wrong; note, you can apologize for “misunderstandings” and hurt feelings even if you're not wrong.
- Don't dominate conversations; let other people have a turn.
- Use a “cooling-off time” before addressing difficult topics.
- Remember life's little courtesies—the pleases and thank yous, offering to get your companion a drink if you're getting one for yourself, etc.
- It all comes down to the Golden Rule: Treat others as you would like to be treated.

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